Malaysia at 50

achievements & aspirations

Edited by
Syed Arabi Idid

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Malaysia At 50: Achievements and Aspirations
Edited by Syed Arabi Idid
Editorial Board: Abdul Rashid Moten, Muhammad Arif Zakaullah, Abdul Aziz Bari, Mohd Sahari Noordin

For more information, please contact:
Thomson Learning
(a division of Thomson Asia Pte Ltd)
5 Shenton Way
#01-01 UIC Building
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Education and Nation Building

Rosnani Hashim*

Malaysia is a multiethnic society where various racial groups live peacefully with one another. It is blessed with a visionary leadership and a sound education system. Education plays a significant role in Malaysia's development of its human resource and economy. Countries with multi-racial and multi-religious populations can benefit from the Malaysian experience.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Centuries before the British arrived, Malaysia,[1] formerly Malaya, was a thriving land of Malay Sultanates, the most celebrated of which was Malacca. In the early 15th century, Malacca was an Islamic intellectual centre. It drew scholars from the rest of the Malay Archipelago, the Far East and the Middle East. The Malayan population was homogeneous in terms of race and religion. British colonialism transformed the society and made it heterogeneous. This was one of the major issues—some would say it was the most serious issue—that the new nation had to struggle with after independence.

EDUCATIONAL SETTING DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

The colonial government sponsored English and Malay vernacular schools but allowed the Chinese and Indians to develop their own Chinese and Tamil schools. The British even had Islamic religious classes in the Malay schools to persuade Malay parents to send their children there. English was the preferred language for colonial commercial enterprises and the English schools thus eventually became the preferred schools among all Malayans. However, these schools were accessible

* Dr. Rosnani Hashim is Professor, Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

[1] Malaysia was the name given to the entity consisting of the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak in 1963. However, Singapore withdrew from Malaysia in 1965.

more to the Chinese because they were located in the towns. The Malays, if they wanted English education for their children, had to overcome the problem of distance and finance and the fear of Christian proselytisation because all English schools were mission schools until the colonial government took over some of them, in addition to building its own English schools.[2] This meant, furthermore, that higher education was denied to most Malays. The only higher education institutions in existence before Independence, such as the King Edward Medical College and the University of Malaya in Singapore, had English as their medium of instruction. Consequently, the Malay community was left far behind the Chinese in modern education and the professions. Higher education for those who went to religious schools was obtained from the Middle East, in particular Al-Azhar University in Egypt, where they studied Islamic religious sciences.

The British did make several attempts to reform the school system after the Second World War, appointing, for instance, committees headed by Barnes and Fenn-Wu to examine the Malay and Chinese schools respectively. They ended up in different directions with respect to social integration. The former supported an assimilationist view while the latter supported a pluralist view. Barnes recommended the gradual transformation of all existing vernacular schools into national schools whereby English and Malay would be the languages of instruction, with Chinese and Tamil to be taught as subjects.[3] Fenn-Wu argued that "the Chinese Malaysians are likely to choose to be trilingual and should be encouraged to do so."[4] Clearly, the Chinese in pre-Independence Malaya desired a pluralistic educational system in contrast to the Malays. As a compromise, the government passed the Education Ordinance of 1952, which retained the four vernacular schools as part of the national school system and gradually introduced English into Malay vernacular schools and Malay and English into the Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools.[5]

Thus, on the eve of Independence, the Federation of Malaya was grappling with the problem of uniting diverse groups into one nation. Like other nations that had been colonised, Malaya also had to grapple with the issue of economic development. The situation in Malaya was worsened by the fact that there was inequality of opportunity and access to higher education and therefore to professional occupations among the races.

EDUCATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

It was the aim of the founding fathers of modern Malaya to unite their ethnically diverse people through the education system. In fact, this was the underlying

[2] H. Rosnani, *Educational Dualism in Malaysia: Implications for Theory and Practice* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[3] Federation of Malaya, *Report of the Committee on Malay Education*. L.J. Barnes, chairman (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1951).

[4] William P. Fenn, and Wu Teh Yao, *Chinese Schools and the Education of Chinese Malayans* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1951)

[5] Ministry of Education, Educational Planning and Research Division, *Education in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Education, 1990).

principle of the Razak Report (1956), which formed the basis of the Malaysian educational system.[6]

> The task of the Razak committee was to examine the present educational policy of the Federation of Malaya and to recommend any alterations or adaptations that are necessary with a view to establishing a national system of education acceptable to the people of the Federation as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, with regard to the intention to make Malay the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the languages and cultures of other communities living in the country.[7]

To orient pupils with a Malayan outlook, to inculcate national consciousness and to foster understanding among the citizens of various races and religions, the Razak Report recommended a common national language, a common content syllabus that would be more Malaya-centred, a common examination and the compulsory study of the national (Malay) and English languages in all primary and secondary schools. The emphasis on the national language for national identity led to the establishment in 1956 of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, a Malay language and literary agency entrusted with the task of developing, enhancing and disseminating the use of the language. The report recommended the conversion of primary schools into national schools (Malay medium) and national-type schools (English, Chinese and Tamil). It was to appease the Chinese and Indians, who had also resolved for the independence of the country, that the national-type schools were allowed to operate in their original languages of instruction. By introducing English in all schools, the committee believed that higher education could be made available to all ethnic groups. Ultimately, the newly independent nation had to content itself with almost the same plural system of primary education. The only major progress in the direction of national unity was the acceptance of Malay as the official language and the mark of national identity.

Due to the economic value of English, the national English-type primary and secondary schools drew the most number of students from all three races. A subsequent effort toward fostering a national education system for all came through the Rahman Talib Report (1960), which acknowledged the necessity of preserving multiculturalism and the importance of the role of education for national unity. The major instrument considered then was the national language. This report proposed that the only way to reconcile the existing basic objectives of education policy, which are to create a national consciousness while at the same time preserving and sustaining the various cultures of the country, is to conduct education at primary level in the language of the family and thereafter to reduce the language and racial differential in our education system. For the sake of national unity, the objective must be to eliminate communal secondary schools from the

[6] Federation of Malaya, *Report of the Education Committee 1956*, Dato'Abdul Razak bin Hussain, chairman (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1956).

[7] Ibid., (Para 1a).

national system of assisted schools and to ensure pupils of all races shall attend both National and National-type secondary schools.[8]

Consequently, the vernacular secondary schools had to decide to either become conforming schools with government financial support or to remain as independent schools. Fifty-four Chinese secondary schools opted to conform while 14 remained as independent schools.[9] The report also endorsed the continuation of the two types of primary schools, the national and the national-type schools. However, it required that examinations in secondary schools be conducted only in the two official languages of the country, namely English and Malay. It also proposed that "primary education in the National Language be developed by the introduction of the National Language stream in English primary schools,"[10] but the policy was dropped after two years due to poor response from parents. It was only in 1968 that the process of conversion of English primary schools began in stages.[11] The Razak and Rahman Talib reports were subsequently incorporated into the Education Act of 1961. The notion of national unity through a common national language as a medium of instruction backfired in a sense, especially during the crucial formative years of the primary school, because only the Malay language national schools complied. Thus, when it comes to the use of a national language in education, Malaysia stands in stark contrast with her immediate neighbours. Both Thailand and Indonesia have always kept to an assimilationist policy, each using its national language as the instruction medium in both public and private schools.

UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC IMBALANCE

To recapitulate, the colonial rulers practically ignored the Malays when it came to providing opportunities for secondary and tertiary education. The only routes for further education for students from the Malay vernacular primary schools were the madrasahs or the English secondary schools, for which they would have to attend a year-long preparatory class. Due to the distance the rural Malays had to travel, the cost and their difficulty with English, many simply dropped out. Thus, English education was elitist.

It was only in 1958 that Malay national secondary schools were established. Yet, after completing secondary education, the Malays had nowhere to go for tertiary education except teachers' colleges which, furthermore, were limited to the Islamic College in Klang, the Sultan Idris Training College in Tanjung Malim and the Malay Women Teachers College in Malacca. A few would go to the Middle East for Islamic studies. In contrast, the Chinese had an abundance of

[8] Federation of Malaya, *Report of the Education Committee 1960*, Dato' Abdul Rahman Talib, chairman (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1960).

[9] Tan Liok Ee, *The politics of Chinese education in Malaya 1945–1961* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[10] Federation of Malaya, *Report of the Education Committee 1960*, para 131–38.

[11] Ministry of Education, *Report on the Implementation of the Recommendation of the Education Review Committee* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1971).

opportunities. They could get secondary education either in the English schools, the independent Chinese secondary schools or the national secondary schools. They could then further their studies in a number of colleges or the University of Malaya or Singapore's Nanyang University or universities in Taiwan.

As early as the 1930s, the Malays had called for the establishment of an integrated Islamic university with the best of Cambridge and Al-Azhar, but the British ignored this. Their call was resumed after independence in view of Malay poverty and their deprivation in higher education. This lack of opportunity for higher education meant a lack of Malay professionals (Table 1), a situation which had been worsened by the colonial government's policy of wooing elite Malays into the civil service. In response to this call and after the absorption of MARA as an agency under the Ministry of Rural Development, the sovereign government in 1967 upgraded the MARA College to MARA Institute of Technology. The institute was to assist Bumiputra in higher education by offering diplomas or pre-degree programmes in a number of professional fields. However, this did not fully meet the demand of the Malay masses because the medium of instruction was English. The grievances of the Malays and their backwardness were analysed as *The Malay Dilemma* (1970), the title of a book by Dr Mahathir Mohamad,[12] who was later to become Prime Minister. The climax of the Malay masses' grievance was the May 13th 1969 racial crisis, which saw violent clashes between the Malays and the Chinese. It erupted immediately after the results of general elections were announced.[13] It was a watershed in Malaysian history. This tragic event prompted the government to adopt affirmative action for the Bumiputra (literally "sons of the soil").

Table 1 : Distribution of Professionals in Malaysia, 1970 (percentage)

Profession	Bumiputra	Non-Bumiputra	Others
Accountancy	6.8	73.3	19.9
Architecture	4.3	82.3	13.4
Engineering	7.3	84.5	8.3
Medicine	3.7	85.0	11.3

Source: Malaysia, *Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981–1985* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printers, 1981), 60.

EDUCATION AND THE MALAY LANGUAGE

In the aftermath of the 1969 racial crisis, affirmative action was adopted to help the Bumiputra in education as the major part of an effort to rectify the economic imbalance between them and the non-Bumiputra. To provide for greater educational opportunity, equity and access, and to inculcate the Malaysian national identity and to foster loyalty to the country, the primacy of Malay as the National

[12] Mahathir Muhamad, *The Malay Dilemma* (Singapore: Times Book International, 1970).

[13] Tunku Abdul Rahman, *May 13: Before and After* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Melayu Press, 1969).

Language was re-asserted. First, the English-type primary and secondary schools were gradually converted to Malay Language National schools, beginning with the primary schools in 1970. The whole cycle encompassing the school system was completed in 1983. Second, the overdue Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (the National University of Malaysia) was established to immediately resolve the problem of lack of opportunity for higher education among Bumiputra because of their problem with the English language. This university used Malay as its medium of instruction in all fields of study—arts and the humanities, natural sciences, applied sciences, and any new field introduced thereafter. To fulfill its role in addressing the economic imbalance in higher education for the Bumiputra, the university enforced a quota system so that its enrolment would be 55 percent Bumiputera. By 1986, the four other public universities—Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)—had also begun to conduct courses in the National Language. This was possible with the return of Bumiputra scholars after they had completed their doctoral studies overseas.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN EDUCATION AND EMPHASIS ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Acknowledging the importance of the natural sciences as foundations for major professional courses and the Bumiputra's lag in them, MARA began setting up the MARA junior science colleges, which are in actual fact residential secondary schools, to provide the early foundations for science education among Bumiputra. The success of the scheme motivated the Ministry of Education to set up more science residential schools throughout the country. The government also awarded scholarships for Bumiputra to study in the fields of science and technology locally and abroad at both undergraduate and graduate levels. A matriculation centre was set up in the University of Malaya to strengthen the Bumiputra students' science foundations and thus prepare them for enrolment in science-based degree programmes.

The process of rectifying economic imbalance and restructuring society was long and gradual. It has been successful to some extent, as can be seen from the rising percentages of Bumiputra who have now become professionals (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of Bumiputra Professionals in 1970, 1990 and 1998 (Per cent of Total Professionals)

Profession	1970	1990	1998
Accountant	6.8	11.5	15.2
Architect	4.3	23.6	28.7
Engineer	7.3	34.8	37.6
Medical Doctor	3.7	27.8	35.8

Source: Malaysia, *Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981–1985* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printers, 1981), 60 and *Berita Harian*, February 14, 2001.

However, the dissolution of the National-Type English primary and secondary schools left a vacuum with respect to a school type that could bring together the various races under one roof because most preferred to go to schools of their mother tongues (Table 3). This was especially true for the Chinese (87.14 per cent) in comparison to the Indians (46.17 per cent) in 1985. The situation was better at the secondary level where 87 per cent of Chinese students continued their secondary education in the national secondary schools, with the remainder continuing in independent Chinese schools.

Table 3: Enrolment in the Various Primary Schools by Race in 1985 (per cent)

Race/School	National	National Type (Chinese)	National Type (Tamil)
Malays	98.93	1.05	0.31
Chinese	12.85	87.14	0
Indians	53.50	1.60	46.17

Source: Ahmad Hussein, "Pendidikan ke arah Perpaduan" [Education for Unity], Paper presented to the Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education, March 19, 1998, 1.

EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

The affirmative actions for correcting the imbalances in educational opportunity and access have shown some snowballing effects, in particular in national economic development. After the 1969 racial crisis, the government initiated the New Economic Policy (NEP), which had two main objectives—the restructuring of society by eliminating identification of occupational function with race through correcting economic imbalance, and the eradication of poverty. The NEP required the private sector to employ Bumiputra and targeted their ownership of equities, which in 1970 amounted to 4.3 percent of the whole, to reach 30 percent by 1990. How was this to be achieved within the short span of 20 years? The government laid out its strategies in its five-year development plans. It was now felt necessary to accelerate national development through an aggressive plan of human capital development through education and training. A substantial portion of the national budget was allocated for education and training, encompassing every level of education. The first noticeable change was the emphasis on science and technology. All the affirmative actions taken reflect this—science residential schools and colleges, scholarships for science and technology and science matriculation programmes. New universities were established by upgrading existing colleges and these included the Agricultural University (now University Putra Malaysia) from the Agricultural College in Serdang and the Technological University (UTM) from the National Technical Institute in Kuala Lumpur. These universities required manpower and scholarships were awarded for lecturers to continue their studies at the doctoral level in good universities in the West. Unlike other developing countries, the rate of return of Western-trained Malaysian scientists and engineers was high. They became scholars and scientists in the local higher education institutions, equipped with the latest scientific and technological skills and knowledge to train budding local students.

This government policy of awarding scholarships to deserving Bumiputra to further their studies in good institutions abroad and return to serve the country continues until today and can be considered as one of the most important mechanisms of producing Bumiputra scientists and engineers. This is in addition to local training. This policy has contributed to at least reducing economic imbalances within 20 years. In addition, the stiff competition for places in the residential science colleges or schools, and for scholarships to study locally or abroad, has become a great incentive for the Bumiputra to excel in their studies. This situation applies also to non-Bumiputra students, who have been eligible for scholarships since 2002. In addition to manning institutions of higher education, many of these new scientists provide the skilled manpower to industry. In the early days most of the scholarship holders would have to serve the government, but today they will have to get their own employment. In addition to scholarships, the government also disburses loans for both local and overseas consumption at the tertiary level and these are to be paid back only upon the graduates' employment.

The Malaysian government has made it compulsory for children to attend at least 11 years of schooling. In 2003, almost 98.5 percent of children of appropriate age were attending primary school.[14] To cater to the huge number of school graduates, the government has also set up polytechnics, community colleges, technical colleges and vocational institutes to prepare the skilled manpower needed for economic development. This seems to be the route for those not accepted into the universities. With this opportunity, they have a choice of being semi-professionals or having a second chance to get a university degree. From the humble beginning of one public university at independence, Malaysia today can boast of about 20 public universities.

In the context of rectifying economic imbalances through affirmative action in education plus a policy of requiring 30 percent Bumiputra participation in the private sector Malaysia, according to some, has been more successful than the United States in solving the problem of poverty.[15] It has succeeded in restructuring Malaysian society as targeted by its New Economic Policy, which was also launched immediately after the 1969 crisis. Despite having achieved so much, the government continues with work to foster national unity, eradicate poverty, reduce social and economic inequalities and imbalances, reduce disparities in economic development between states and between rural and urban areas, restructure Malaysian society, promote human resource development, and make science and technology an integral part of socio-economic development.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

The New Economic Policy and affirmative action implemented after the 1969 crisis and targeted to end in 1990 have succeeded in advancing the Bumiputra; the economic gap between them and their non-Bumiputra compatriots has narrowed and professional distinctions have broken down. In the process, however, the

[14] Ministry of Education. Educational Planning and Research Division, *Educational Statistics 2003* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Education, 2003).

[15] Lin-Sheng Ye, *The Chinese Dilemma* (Kingsford, NSW: East West Publishing Pty. Ltd, 2003).

non-Bumiputra have felt alienated and have criticised the New Economic Policy as discriminative and insensitive to them.[16] However, the statistical evidence seems to dispute this allegation. The non-Bumiputra's share of the economic equities has increased substantially owing to acquisition from foreign ownership (Table 4). It was argued that there were fewer places for the non-Bumiputra in tertiary education due to the quota system, which forced many to look for places abroad. The situation was not critical until the economic crisis of 1997, when the Malaysian currency was devalued, making it hard for non-Bumiputra parents to support their children overseas.

Table 4 : Ownership of Share Capital of Limited Companies in West Malaysia

Ownership	1970	1990 (target)	1990 (actual)
Bumiputra	4.3	30	19.2
Non-Bumiputra	34.0	40	46.8
Foreign	61.7	30	25.4

Source: Malaysia, *Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981–1985)*, 62 and *Mid-Term Review of the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–1995)*, 67.

The Malaysian government has to play the juggler between the interests of Bumiputra and non-Bumiputra to ensure social equilibrium. Consequently, the Ministry of Education has been obliged to expand higher education, first by abolishing the quota for public universities, and second by exhorting the private sector to play a major role in providing higher education. Thus, in 1996, the Private Higher Education Institution Act was passed, allowing for the setting up of private higher education colleges or universities, and branches of foreign universities. With this act, Kolej Tunku Abdul Rahman, an institution established by the Malaysian Chinese Association, was upgraded to Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, and numerous colleges were founded, such as Sunway, Inti, Kolej Damansara Utama, PTPL and Sal College. The establishment of the private colleges and universities was also in line with the aspiration of the Malaysian government to transform Malaysia into a regional centre of educational excellence that would be able to draw international students. Thus, there are now not only more places for higher education for Malaysians, but even for foreign students. To ensure that the private colleges and universities meet the highest standards, a National Accreditation Council (Lembaga Akreditasi Negara) was established to monitor programme quality under the 1996 Education Act.

Although the private colleges and universities meet the need for educational opportunities, they do not serve the goal of nation building in several respects. First, in the interest of drawing international students, the Ministry of Education allows for the use of English as the language of instruction while the public universities still use the national language. Second, since the private institutions charge large sums in fees, only the rich can afford to send their children

[16] Kua Kia Soong, *Reviewing Malaysian Education* (Kuala Lumpur: The Resource and Research Centre, Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, 1990) and Singh, J. S. and Mukherjee, H., *Education and National Integration in Malaysia: Stocktaking Thirty Years after Independence* (Kuala Lumpur: Pengajian Pembangunan Manusia, Institut Pengajian Tinggi, 1990).

there. Inevitably, these institutions have very few Malays except those sponsored by government agencies. Thus, the existence of these institutions threatens to undermine the goals of the New Economic Policy 1970–90, later replaced by the National Development Plan 1990–2004 and then the New Economic Agenda 2005–2020. Currently, non-Bumiputra make up about 45 percent of the students in public institutions and 90 percent in private institutions. Hence, the new policy deriving from the 1996 act is useful in expanding higher educational opportunities, especially for non-Bumiputra, but would result in a greater imbalance between the races unless more Bumiputra are recruited through scholarships or self-realisation on the need to invest in higher education.

ISLAM AS THE EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

Islam has been the basis of Malay tradition, language and culture since the 14th century. There are records showing that Islam was by then already the basis of laws in Malacca, Terengganu and Kedah. In fact, before the arrival of the British, Islamic religious knowledge was being taught in traditional fashion at madrasah and similar institutions. The colonial period, however, saw the gradual replacement of Islamic law by British common law. The Pangkor Treaty of 1874 saw the beginning of secularisation in Malaya, in which the Sultan was authorised only to oversee rulings regarding Malay customs and traditions while the British held authority in other matters of the state, such as criminal, commercial and land laws. With the establishment of English and Malay vernacular schools, religion was marginalised and, if at all, was taught after regular school hours in the afternoon by teachers paid by Malay parents. It was only when Islamic religious sciences were brought into the school curriculum, although in a separate afternoon session, that the number of Malays attending the Malay vernacular schools increased. Many Malay parents shunned the English schools, which were originally founded by Christian missionaries, for fear of religious conversion. The absence of Islamic religious knowledge from the curriculum led to secularised thought and action, thus further estranging the Malays from these schools.

It was only after independence that Islamic religious knowledge was introduced into the national primary and secondary schools, including the English-type schools. However, Islamic religious instruction was introduced with an emphasis on knowledge rather than *'ibādah* (worship) and practice. Most students in the afternoon session would miss their noon prayers because school would have begun and there were no places for prayer. With the rise of Islamic awareness in the 1970s and the educational reforms of the 1980s, the hours for teaching Islamic Religious Studies were increased to enable the practical aspects of religion, Jawi (the Arabic-derived script), and Qur'anic reading to be incorporated into the curriculum. An important achievement in the context of Islamic education was the setting up in 1977 of National Religious Secondary Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama), which cater to the need of producing both potential Islamic religious scholars (*'ulamā*) and also professionals grounded in Islamic knowledge. This helped ease the Muslim dilemma of choosing between traditional education in the madrasah and the national schools in order to produce professionals strongly anchored in their faith as well as religious scholars well-versed with developments

in both the human sciences and science and technology.[17] These schools enable the country to develop Islamically-conscious professionals and also religious personnel and scholars. Admission into these schools is competitive, for they offer an integrated education whereby students also study the pure sciences and mathematics in addition to the religious sciences. The number of such schools increased from 11 in 1977 to 55 in 2004. The educational reforms of the 1980s, including the National Philosophy of Education formulated in 1987, emphasised a balanced and holistic education which has resulted in more Muslim students being aware of their religious responsibility even as they attend schools, which today provide spaces for prayer and encourage female students to wear the *tudung* (headscarf).

The pinnacle in the development of Islamic education was the establishment of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in 1983 and the Islamic Sciences University Malaysia (USIM) in 2007, thus fulfilling the aspirations of Muslim scholars and activists of the 1930s such as Sutan Merican and Za'aba, and Muslim intellectuals of the 1960s.[18] Prior to these, higher Islamic education was offered under a faculty in UKM or an academy in UM. These are considered as partially secularised because the Islamic sciences are compartmentalised and thus separated from all the other branches of knowledge. The new universities have a comprehensive philosophy and all the sciences are taught from an Islamic perspective, which points to a unity of knowledge and truth.

The presence of Islamic elements in the national education system has made some non-Muslim parents apprehensive due to misunderstandings and the negative images of Islam and Muslims conjured by popular media. It is a fact that Islam arrived in this part of the world peacefully and Muslims in the Malay world have been tolerant and respectful towards people of other faiths. It is the universality of Islam that has taught them to accept others regardless of colour, faith, ethnicity and language. More important, non-Muslim Malaysians have to accept the fact that Islam has been the leading culture of this part of the world since the 14th century, if not earlier, and that Malaya was predominantly a Muslim land before the Europeans arrived.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM FOR MORAL AND CITIZENSHIP VALUES

The effort toward nation building is continuous. Schools are considered as next in importance to the home for the inculcation of moral values in order to raise disciplined and well-mannered citizens. Consistent with this view, the national schools introduced Moral Education for non-Muslim students in 1983 for primary schools[19] and in 1989 for secondary schools as part of the education reforms.

[17] See H. Rosnani, *Educational Dualism in Malaysia: Implications for Theory and Practice* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[18] Abdullah Md Zin, Zulkiplie Abdul Ghani & Abdul Ghafar Hj Don, *Pendidikan Islam di Malaysia: Dari Pondok ke Universiti* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2005).

[19] Malaysia, *Laporan Jawatankuasa Kabinet Mengkaji Pelaksanaan Dasar Pelajaran 1979* (Kuala Lumpur: Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1982).

Since Moral Education and Islamic Education are taught separately for the two groups, there was no opportunity for interaction with regard to discussion of civic values in depth. Since the various races are segregated by choice in the primary schools, the secondary schools were considered as the most fertile ground for racial and cultural interaction and understanding. Therefore, in 2005 the Ministry of Education reintroduced the subject called Civics and Citizenship Education so that students of various races and cultures could sit together and be trained to deliberate on issues of common concern as citizens. This is important because if the exercise is well done, then as future citizens they will learn to resolve critical issues affecting them through deliberation as the founding fathers of the nation did.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that the Malaysian government has greatly used the education system to develop and sustain its economic growth and to engineer social change, in particular to redress the grievances of every community in the country so that its wealth is distributed justly and citizens of all races and religions would continue to enjoy peace and prosperity. The Ministry of Education has tried all kinds of innovative ideas to foster skin deep racial unity such as Integrated Schools, Vision Schools and Students' Integration for Unity at the primary-education level, but so far none of these has been greatly successful. Consequently, in 2002, the government introduced the National Service Training Programme for students who have completed the final year of secondary school to foster racial and national integration before students go into the real world. The programme is a two-month stint of physical military-style training, group discussion and community-based activities conducted at camps.

Currently, the Ministry is attempting to make the national and not the national-type schools the schools of choice for all Malaysians regardless of race by offering Mandarin, Tamil, and Arabic; teaching science and mathematics in English and providing technological innovations through the Smart School concept. However, attachment to culture and language is apparently still very strong; Chinese parents, especially, still prefer to enroll their children in the National-type schools.

Perhaps, in this respect, Malaysia should learn from the experiences of Thailand and Indonesia, especially in regard to the role of the national language and its acceptance among citizens. In these countries and also in the West, non-indigenous citizens have learned to speak the language of the majority so fluently that the indigenous have accepted them as compatriots. In Malaysia, however, the Bumiputras generally regard the Chinese and Indians as aliens because most of them have not succeeded in using the national language well. This matter has been made worse with English being allowed a comeback not only in universities but also the school system.

Being fluent in the national language does not mean closure of the National-type primary schools or the elimination of the languages and cultures of the rest, but it does mean that the non-Bumiputra have to understand the matter with respect to national integration and exert more effort to acquire the national language.

Finally there has to be more contact or interaction between students of the various races at the primary-school level. But it is hard to see how this can be done when students are being ethnically segregated at that very level. We propose that all national primary schools, including the national-type primary schools, be revamped into single-session schools so that the morning hours could be devoted to formal curriculum instruction and the afternoon to a cultural or ethnic-based curriculum that would include languages, religion and moral education. If this proves difficult to promote because the non-Malay communities feel a sense of loss from the abolition of national-type schools, then we propose that all non-Malay children attend compulsory national schools in the morning and go to their national-type schools in the afternoon. After all, Malay children have been attending Qur'anic and religious classes in the afternoon in religious schools. The Ministry of Education has to deliberate on this matter with representatives of all ethnic groups and political and community leaders should join hands in persuading all Malaysian citizens to accept the government's decision for the sake of future generations.

National Philosophy of Education

Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large.

Source: Ministry of Education, Malaysia